

Love
Poems
of
Browning
& Hunt



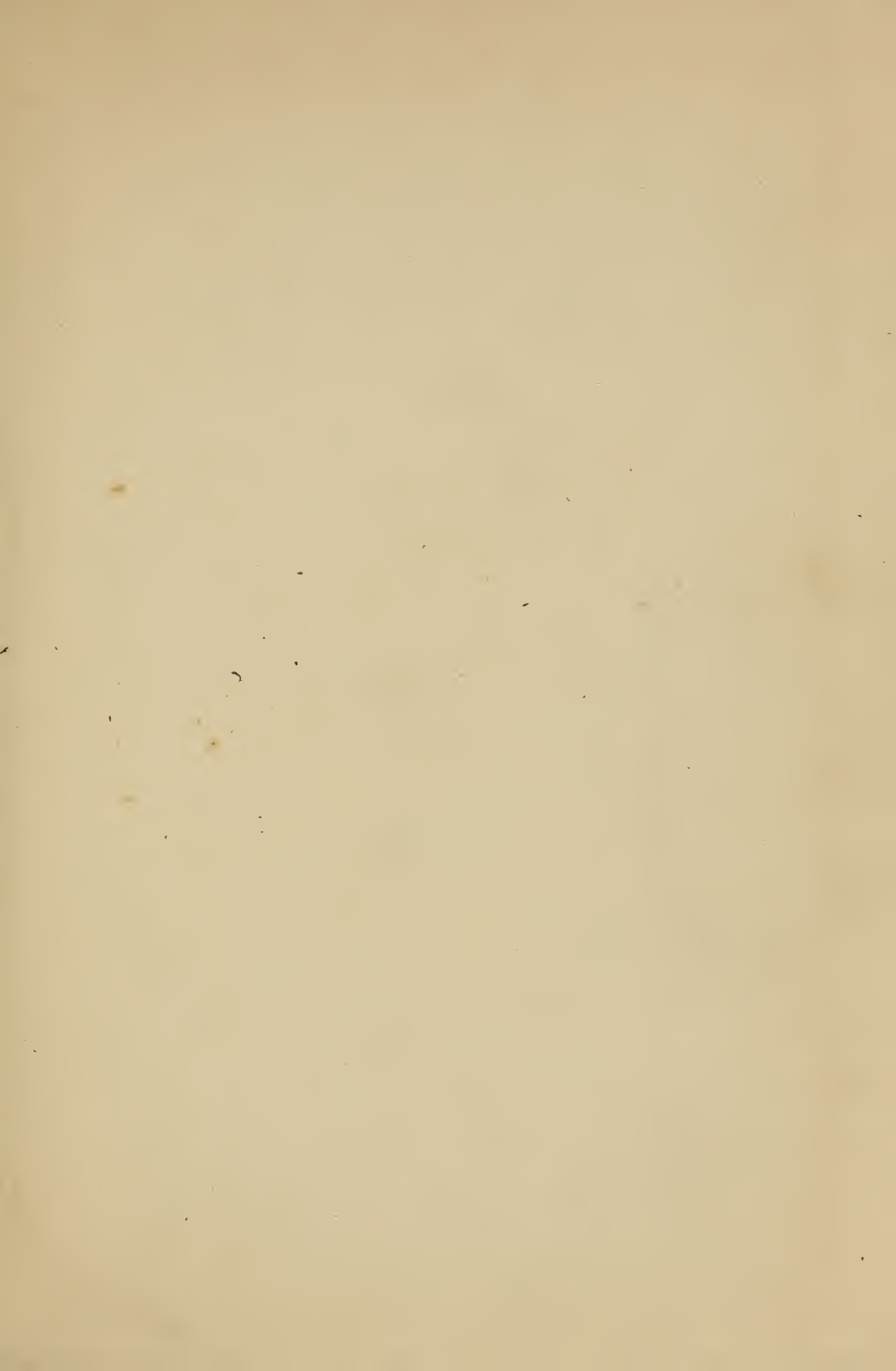


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The Love Poems

of

Robert Browning

and

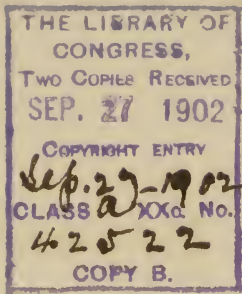
Leigh Hunt



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[Love Poems of Browning and Hunt]

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The Love Poems

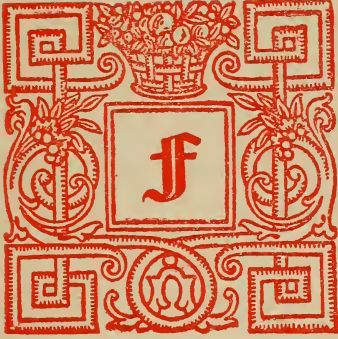
of

Robert Browning

O lady, there be many things
That seem right fair, below, above ;
But sure not one among them all
Is half so sweet as love.

—*Oliver Wendell Holmes.*

Robert Browning



OR life, with all it yields of
joy and woe,
And hope and fear,—be-
lieve the aged friend,—
Is just our chance o' the
prize of learning love,
How love might be, hath
been indeed, and is ;

And that we hold thenceforth to the uttermost
Such prize despite the envy of the world,
And, having gained truth, keep truth : that
is all.

But see the double way wherein we are led,
How the soul learns diversely from the flesh !
With flesh, that hath so little time to stay,
And yields mere basement for the soul's
emprise,

Expect prompt teaching. Helpful was the
light,

Robert Browning

And warmth was cherishing and food was
choice

To every man's flesh, thousand years ago,
As now to yours and mine; the body sprang
At once to the height, and stayed: but the
soul,—no!

—*From "A Death in the Desert."*

Robert Browning



IVE her but a least excuse
to love me !

When—where—

How—can this arm estab-
lish her above me,

If fortune fixed her as
my lady there,

There already, to eternally

reprove me ?

(“Hist!”—said Kate the queen ;

But “Oh,” cried the maiden, binding her
tresses,

“’Tis only a page that carols unseen,
Crumbling your hounds their messes !”)

Is she wronged ?—To the rescue of her honor,
My heart !

Is she poor ?—What costs it to be styled a
donor ?

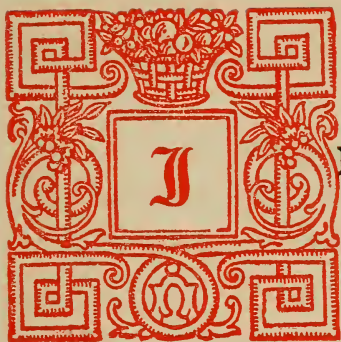
Robert Browning

Merely an earth to cleave, a sea to part.
But that fortune should have thrust all this
upon her !

(“Nay, list !”—bade Kate the queen ;
And still cried the maiden, binding her tresses,
“’Tis only a page that carols unseen,
Fitting your hawks their jesses !”)

—*From “Pippa Passes.”*

Robert Browning



N A BALCONY.

CONSTANCE *and* NORBERT.

Nor. Now !

Con. Not now !

Nor. Give me them again, those hands—
Put them upon my forehead, how it throbs !
Press them before my eyes, the fire comes
through !

You cruelest, you dearest in the world,
Let me ! The Queen must grant whate'er I
ask—

How can I gain you and not ask the Queen ?
There she stays waiting for me, here stand
you ;

Robert Browning

Some time or other this was to be asked :
Now is the one time—what I ask, I gain :
Let me ask now, Love !

Con. Do, and ruin us !

Nor. Let it be now, Love ! All my soul
breaks forth.

How I do love you ! Give my love its way !
A man can have but one life and one death,
One heaven, one hell. Let me fulfil my
fate—

Grant me my heaven now ! Let me know
you mine,

Prove you mine, write my name upon your
brow,

Hold you and have you, and then die away,
If God please, with completion in my soul.

Con. I am not yours then ? How content
this man !

I am not his—who change into himself,

Robert Browning

Have passed into his heart and beat its beats,
Who give my hands to him, my eyes, my
hair,
Give all that was of me away to him—
So well, that now, my spirit turned his own,
Takes part with him against the woman
here,
Bids him not stumble at so mere a straw
As caring that the world be cognizant
How he loves her and how she worships him.
You have this woman, not as yet that world.
Go on, I bid, nor stop to care for me
By saving what I cease to care about,
The courtly name and pride of circum-
stance—
The name you'll pick up and be cumbered
with
Just for the poor parade's sake, nothing
more ;

Robert Browning

Just that the world may slip from under
you—

Just that the world may cry “So much for
him—

The man predestined to the heap of crowns :
There goes his chance of winning one, at
least!”

Nor. The world !

Con. You love it ! Love me quite
as well,

And see if I shall pray for this in vain !
Why must you ponder what it knows or
thinks ?

Nor. You pray for—what, in vain ?

Con. Oh, my heart’s heart,
How I do love you, Norbert ! That is right :
But listen, or I take my hands away !
You say, “let it be now :” you would go now
And tell the Queen, perhaps six steps from us,

Robert Browning

You love me—so you do, thank God !

Nor. Thank God !

Con. Yes, Norbert,—but you fain would
tell your love,

And, what succeeds the telling, ask of her
My hand. Now take this rose and look at it,
Listening to me. You are the minister,
The Queen's first favourite, nor without a
cause.

To-night completes your wonderful year's-
work

(This palace-feast is held to celebrate)
Made memorable by her life's success,
The junction of two crowns on her sole
head,

Her house had only dreamed of anciently :
That this mere dream is grown a stable
truth,

To-night's feast makes authentic. Whose
the praise ?

Robert Browning

Whose genius, patience, energy, achieved
What turned the many heads and broke the
hearts ?

You are the fate, your minute's in the
heaven.

Next comes the Queen's turn. " Name
your own reward ! "

With leave to clench the past, chain the to-
come,

Put out an arm and touch and take the sun
And fix it ever full-faced on your earth,
Possess yourself supremely of her life,—
You choose the single thing she will not
grant ;

Nay, very declaration of which choice
Will turn the scale and neutralize your
work :

At best, she will forgive you, if she can.
You think I'll let you choose—her cousin's
hand ?

Robert Browning

Nor. Wait. First, do you retain your old
belief

The Queen is generous,—nay, is just?

Con.

There, there!

So men make women love them, while they
know

No more of women's hearts than . . . look
you here,

You that are just and generous beside,
Make it your own case! For example now,
I'll say—I let you kiss me, hold my hands—
Why? do you know why? I'll instruct you,
then—

The kiss, because you have a name at court,
This hand and this, that you may shut in
each

A jewel, if you please to pick up such.
That's horrible? Apply it to the Queen—
Suppose I am the Queen to whom you speak.

Robert Browning

“ I was a nameless man ; you needed me :
Why did I proffer you my aid ? there stood
A certain pretty cousin at your side.
Why did I make such common cause with
you ?

Access to her had not been easy else.
You give my labor here abundant praise ?
'Faith, labor, which she overlooked, grew
play.

How shall your gratitude discharge itself ?
Give me her hand ! ”

Nor. And still I urge the same.

Is the Queen just ? just—generous or no ?

Con. Yes, just. You love a rose ; no harm
in that :

But was it for the rose's sake or mine
You put it in your bosom ? mine, you said—
Then, mine you still must say or else be false.
You told the Queen you served her for her-
self ;

Robert Browning

If so, to serve her was to serve yourself,
She thinks, for all your unbelieving face !
I know her. In the hall, six steps from us,
One sees the twenty pictures ; there's a life
Better than life, and yet no life at all.

Conceive her born in such a magic dome,
Pictures all round her ! why, she sees the
world,

Can recognize its given things and facts,
The fight of giants or the feast of gods,
Sages in senate, beauties at the bath,
Chases and battles, the whole earth's display,
Landscape and sea-piece, down to flowers
and fruit—

And who shall question that she knows them
all,

In better semblance than the things outside?
Yet bring into the silent gallery

Some live thing to contrast in breath and
blood,

Robert Browning

Some lion, with the painted lion there—
You think she'll understand composedly ?
—Say, "that's his fellow in the hunting-piece
Yonder, I've turned to praise a hundred
times ?"

Not so. Her knowledge of our actual earth,
Its hopes and fears, concerns and sympathies,
Must be too far, too mediate, too unreal.
The real exists for us outside, not her :
How should it, with that life in these four
walls,

That father and that mother, first to last
No father and no mother—friends, a heap,
Lovers, no lack—a husband in due time,
And every one of them alike a lie !
Things painted by a Rubens out of naught
Into what kindness, friendship, love should
be ;

All better, all more grandiose than the life,

Robert Browning

Only no life ; mere cloth and surface-paint,
You feel, while you admire. How should
she feel ?

Yet now that she has stood thus fifty years
The sole spectator in that gallery,
You think to bring this warm real struggling
love

In to her of a sudden, and suppose
She'll keep her state untroubled ? Here's
the truth :

She'll apprehend truth's value at a glance,
Prefer it to the pictured loyalty ?

You only have to say, " So men are made,
For this they act ; the thing has many names,
But this the right one : and now, Queen, be
just ! "

Your life slips back ; you lose her at the word :
You do not even for amends gain me.

He will not understand ! oh, Norbert, Nor-
bert,

Robert Browning

Do you not understand ?

Nor. The Queen's the Queen :
I am myself—no picture, but alive
In every nerve and every muscle, here
At the palace-window o'er the people's street,
As she in the gallery where the pictures glow :
The good of life is precious to us both.
She can not love ; what do I want with rule ?
When first I saw your face a year ago
I knew my life's good, my soul heard one
 voice—
“ The woman yonder, there's no use of life
But just to obtain her ! heap earth's woes in
 one
And bear them—make a pile of all earth's
 joys
And spurn them, as they help or help not this ;
Only, obtain her ! ”—How was it to be ?
I found you were the cousin of the Queen ;

Robert Browning

I must then serve the Queen to get to you.
No other way. Suppose there had been one,
And I, by saying prayers to some white star
With promise of my body and my soul,
Might gain you,—should I pray the star
or no?

Instead there was the Queen to serve! I
served,
Helped, did what other servants failed to do.
Neither she sought nor I declared my end.
Her good is hers, my recompense be mine,
I therefore name you as that recompense.
She dreamed that such a thing could never be?
Let her wake now. She thinks there was
more cause
In love of power, high fame, pure loyalty?
Perhaps she fancies men wear out their lives
Chasing such shades. Then I've a fancy,
too;

Robert Browning

I worked because I want you with my soul :
I therefore ask your hand. Let it be now !

Con. Had I not loved you from the very
first,

Were I not yours, could we not steal out thus
So wickedly, so wildly, and so well,
You might become impatient. What's con-
ceived

Of us without here, by the folks within ?
Where are you now ? immersed in cares of
state—

Where am I now ?—intent on festal robes—
We two, embracing under death's spread
hand !

What was this thought for, what that scruple
of yours

Which broke the council up ?—to bring about
One minute's meeting in the corridor !

And then the sudden sleights, strange secre-
cies,

Robert Browning

Complots inscrutable, deep telegraphs,
Long-planned chance meetings, hazards of a
look,

“ Does she know ? does she not know ? saved
or lost ? ”

A year of this compression's ecstasy
All goes for nothing ! you would give this up
For the old way, the open way, the world's,
His way who beats, and his who sells his
wife !

What tempts you ?—their notorious happi-
ness,

Makes you ashamed of ours ? The best
you'll gain

Will be—the Queen grants all that you require,
Concedes the cousin, rids herself of you
And me at once, and gives us ample leave
To live like our five hundred happy friends.
The world will show us with officious hand

Robert Browning

Our chamber entry, and stand sentinel,
Where we so oft have stolen across its
traps !

Get the world's warrant, ring the falcon's
feet,

And make it duty to be bold and swift,
Which long ago was nature. Have it so !
We never hawked by rights till flung from
fist ?

Oh, the man's thought ; no woman's such a
fool,

Nor. Yes, the man's thought and my
thought, which is more—

One made to love you, let the world take
note !

Have I done worthy work ? be love's the
praise,

Tho' hampered by restrictions, barred
against

Robert Browning

By set forms, blinded by forced secrecies !
Set free my love, and see what love can do
Shown in my life—what work will spring
from that !

The world is used to have its business done
On other grounds, find great effects produced
For power's sake, fame's sake, motives in
men's mouth !

So, good : but let my low ground shame
their high !

Truth is the strong thing. Let man's life be
true !

And love's the truth of mine. Time prove
the rest !

I choose to wear you stamped all over me,
Your name upon my forehead and my breast,
You, from the sword's blade to the ribbon's
edge,

That men may see, all over, you in me—

Robert Browning

That pale loves may die out of their pretence
In face of mine, shames thrown on love fall
off.

Permit this, Constance! Love has been so
long

Subdued in me, eating me through and
through,

That now 't is all of me and must have way.

Think of my work, that chaos of intrigues,

Those hopes and fears, surprises and delays,

That long endeavour, earnest, patient, slow,

Trembling at last to its assured result—

Then think of this revulsion! I resume

Life after death, (it is no less than life,

After such long unlovely labouring days)

And liberate to beauty life's great need

O' the beautiful, which, while it prompted
work,

Suppressed itself erewhile. This eve's the
time,

Robert Browning

This eve intense with yon first trembling star
We seem to pant and reach ; scarce aught
between

The earth that rises and the heaven that
bends ;

All nature self-abandoned, every tree
Flung as it will, pursuing its own thoughts
And fixed so, every flower and every weed,
No pride, no shame, no victory, no defeat ;
All under God, each measured by itself
These statues round us stand abrupt, distinct,
The strong in strength, the weak in weak-
ness fixed,

The Muse for ever wedded to her lyre,
Nymph to her fawn, and Silence to her rose:
See God's approval on His universe !
Let us do so—aspire to live as these
In harmony with truth, ourselves being true !
Take the first way, and let the second come !

Robert Browning

My first is to possess myself of you ;
The music sets the march-step—forward,
then!

And there's the Queen, I go to claim you of,
The world to witness, wonder and applaud.
Our flower of life breaks open. No delay!

Con. And so shall we be ruined, both of us.
Norbert, I know her to the skin and bone :
You do not know her, were not born to it,
To feel what she can see or cannot see.
Love, she is generous,—ay, despite your
smile,

Generous as you are : for, in that thin frame
Pain-twisted, punctured through and through
with cares,

There lived a lavish soul until it starved,
Debarred of healthy food. Look to the soul—
Pity that, stoop to that, ere you begin
(The true man's-way) on justice and your
rights,

Robert Browning

Exactions and acquittance of the past !
Begin so—see what justice she will deal !
We women hate a debt as men a gift.
Suppose her some poor keeper of a school
Whose business is to sit thro' summer
 months
And dole out children leave to go and play,
Herself superior to such lightness—she
In the arm-chair's state and pædagogic
 pomp,.
To the life, the laughter, sun and youth out-
 side :
We wonder such a face looks black on us ?
I do not bid you wake her tenderness,
(That were vain, truly—none is left to wake)
But, let her think her justice is engaged
To take the shape of tenderness, and mark
If she'll not coldly pay its warmest debt !
Does she love me, I ask you ? not a whit :

Robert Browning

Yet, thinking that her justice was engaged
To help a kinswoman, she took me up—
Did more on that bare ground than other
loves

Would do on greater argument. For me,
I have no equivalent of such cold kind
To pay her with, but love alone to give
If I give anything. I give her love :
I feel I ought to help her, and I will.
So, for her sake, as yours, I tell you twice
That women hate a debt as men a gift.
If I were you, I could obtain this grace—
Could lay the whole I did to love's account
Nor yet be very false as courtiers go—
Declaring my success was recompense ;
It would be so, in fact : what were it else ?
And then, once loose her generosity,—
Oh, how I see it !—then, were I but you
To turn it, let it seem to move itself,

Robert Browning

And make it offer what I really take,
Accepting just, in the poor cousin's hand,
Her value as the next thing to the Queen's—
Since none love Queens directly, none dare
that,

And a thing's shadow or a name's mere echo
Suffices those who miss the name and thing!
You pick up just a ribbon she has worn,
To keep in proof how near her breath you
came.

Say, I 'm so near I seem a piece of her—
Ask for me that way—(oh, you understand)
You 'd find the same gift yielded with a grace,
Which, if you make the least show to
extort . . .

—You 'll see! and when you have ruined
both of us,

Dissertate on the Queen's ingratitude!

Nor. Then, if I turn it that way, you con-
sent?

Robert Browning

'T is not my way ; I have more hope in truth :
Still, if you won't have truth—why, this
indeed,

Were scarcely false, as I 'd express the sense.
Will you remain here ?

Con. O best heart of mine,
How I have loved you ! then, you take my
way ?

Are mine as you have been her minister,
Work out my thought, give it effect for me,
Paint plain my poor conceit and make it
serve ?

I owe that withered woman everything—
Life, fortune, you, remember ! Take my
part—

Help me to pay her ! Stand upon your rights ?
You, with my rose, my hands, my heart on
you ?

Your rights are mine—you have no rights
but mine.

Robert Browning

Nor. Remain here. How you know me!

Con. Ah, but still——

[*He breaks from her : she remains. Dance-music from within.*

Enter the Queen.

Queen. Constance? She is here, as he said. Speak quick! Is it so? Is it true or false? One word!

Con. True.

Queen. Mercifullest Mother, thanks to thee!

Con. Madam?

Queen. I love you, Constance, from my soul. Now say once more, with any words you will, 'T is true, all true, as true as that I speak.

Con. Why should you doubt it?

Queen. Ah, why doubt? why doubt? Dear, make me see it! Do you see it so? None see themselves; another sees them best.

Robert Browning

You say "why doubt it?"—you see him and me.

It is because the Mother has such grace
That if we had but faith—wherein we fail—
Whate'er we yearn for would be granted us;
Yet still we let our whims prescribe despair,
Our fancies thwart and cramp our will and power,

And while accepting life, abjure its use.
Constance, I had abjured the hope of love
And being loved, as truly as yon palm
The hope of seeing Egypt from that plot.

Con. Heaven!

Queen. But it was so, Constance, it was so!
Men say—or do men say it? fancies say—
"Stop here, your life is set, you are grown old.

Too late—no love for you, too late for love—
Leave love to girls. Be queen: let Con-
stance love!"

Robert Browning

One takes the hint—half meets it like a child,
Ashamed at any feelings that oppose.

“Oh love, true, never think of love again!

I am a queen: I rule, not love forsooth.”

So it goes on; so a face grows like this,
Hair like this hair, poor arms as lean as these,
Till,—nay, it does not end so, I thank God!

Con. I can not understand

Queen.

The happier you!

Constance, I know not how it is with men:

For women (I am a woman now like you)

There is no good of life but love—but love!

What else looks good, is some shade flung
from love;

Love gilds it, gives it worth. Be warned by
me,

Never you cheat yourself one instant! Love,

Give love, ask only love, and leave the rest!

O Constance, how I love you!

Con.

I love you.

Robert Browning

Queen. I do believe that all is come thro'
you.

I took you to my heart to keep it warm
When the last chance of love seemed dead
in me;

I thought your fresh youth warmed my
withered heart.

Oh, I am very old now, am I not?

Not so! it is true and it shall be true!

Con. Tell it me: let me judge if true or false.

Queen. Ah, but I fear you! you will look
at me

And say, "she 's old, she 's grown unlovely
quite

Who ne'er was beauteous: men want beauty
still."

Well, so I feared—the curse! so I felt sure.

Con. Be calm. And now you feel not sure.
you say?

Robert Browning

Queen. Constance, he came,—the coming
was not strange—

Do not I stand and see men come and go?

I turned a half-look from my pedestal

Where I grow marble—"one young man the
more!

He will love some one; that is naught to me:

What would he with my marble stateli-
ness?"

Yet this seemed somewhat worse than here-
tofore;

The man more gracious, youthful, like a god,

And I still older, with less flesh to change—

We two those dear extremes that long to
touch.

It seemed still harder when he first began

To labor at those state-affairs, absorbed

The old way for the old end—interest.

Oh, to live with a thousand beating hearts

Robert Browning

Around you, swift eyes, serviceable hands,
Professing they've no care but for your cause,
Thought but to help you, love but for your-
self,

And you the marble statue all the time
They praise and point at as preferred to life,
Yet leave for the first breathing woman's
smile,

First dancer's, gipsy's or street baladine's !
Why, how I have ground my teeth to hear
men's speech

Stifled for fear it should alarm my ear,
Their gait subdued lest step should startle
me,

Their eyes declined, such queendom to
respect,

Their hands alert, such treasure to preserve,
While not a man of them broke rank and
spoke,

Robert Browning

Wrote me a vulgar letter all of love,
Or caught my hand and pressed it like a
hand!

There have been moments, if the sentinel
Lowering his halbert to salute the queen,
Had flung it brutally and clasped my knees,
I would have stooped and kissed him with
my soul.

Con. Who could have comprehended?

Queen.

Ay, who—who?

Why, no one, Constance, but this one who
did.

Not they, not you, not I. Even now perhaps
It comes too late—would you but tell the
truth.

Con. I wait to tell it.

Queen.

Well, you see, he came,
Outfaced the others, did a work this year
Exceeds in value all was ever done,

Robert Browning

You know—it is not I who say it—all
Say it. And so (a second pang and worse)
I grew aware not only of what he did,
But why so wondrously. Oh, never work
Like his was done for work's ignoble sake—
Souls need a finer aim to light and lure!
I felt, I saw, he loved—loved somebody.
And Constance, my dear Constance, do you
know,

I did believe this while 't was you he loved.

Con. Me, madam?

Queen. It did seem to me, your face
Met him where'er he looked: and whom but
you

Was such a man to love? It seemed to me,
You saw he loved you, and approved his love,
And both of you were in intelligence.

You could not loiter in that garden, step
Into this balcony, but I straight was stung

Robert Browning

And forced to understand. It seemed so true,
So right, so beautiful, so like you both,
That all this work should have been done by
him

Not for the vulgar hope of recompense,
But that at last—suppose, some night like
this—

Borne on to claim his due reward of me,
He might say, “Give her hand and pay me
so.”

And I (O Constance, you shall love me now!)
I thought, surmounting all the bitterness,
—“And he shall have it. I will make her
blest,

My flower of youth, my woman’s self that
was,

My happiest woman’s self that might have
been!

These two shall have their joy and leave me
here.”

Yes—yes!

Robert Browning

Con. Thanks!

Queen. And the word was on my lips
When he burst in upon me. I looked to hear
A mere calm statement of his just desire
For payment of his labour. When—O
heaven,
How can I tell you? lightning on my eyes
And thunder in my ears proved that first word
Which told 't was love of me, of me, did all—
He loved me—from the first step to the last,
Loved me!

Con. You hardly saw, scarce heard him
speak
Of love: what if you should mistake?

Queen. No, no—
No mistake! Ha, there shall be no mistake!
He had not dared to hint the love he felt—
You were my reflex—(how I understood!)
He said you were the ribbon I had worn,

Robert Browning

He kissed my hand, he looked into my eyes,
And love, love came at end of every phrase.
Love is begun; this much is come to pass:
The rest is easy. Constance, I am yours!
I will learn, I will place my life on you,
Teach me but how to keep what I have won!
Am I so old? This hair was early gray;
But joy ere now has brought hair brown
again,
And joy will bring the cheek's red back, I feel.
I could sing once, too; that was in my youth.
Still, when men paint me, they declare me
. . . yes,
Beautiful—for the last French painter did!
I know they flatter somewhat; you are frank—
I trust you. How I loved you from the first!
Some queens would hardly seek a cousin out
And set her by their side to take the eye:
I must have felt that good would come from
you.

Robert Browning

I am not generous—like him—like you!
But he is not your lover after all:
It was not you he looked at. Saw you him?
You had not been mistaking words or looks?
He said you were the reflex of myself.
And yet he is not such a paragon
To you, to younger women who may choose
Among a thousand Norberts. Speak the
truth!

You know you never named his name to me—
You know, I can not give him up—ah God,
Not up now, even to you !

Con. Then calm yourself.

Queen. See, I am old—look here, you happy girl!

I will not play the fool, deceive—ah whom?
'T is all gone: put your cheek beside my
cheek,

And what a contrast does the moon behold!

Robert Browning

But then I set my life upon one chance,
The last chance and the best—am I not left,
My soul, myself? All women love great men,
If young or old; it is in all the tales:
Young beauties love old poets who can love—
Why should not he, the poems in my soul,
The passionate faith, the pride of sacrifice,
Life-long, death-long? I throw them at his
feet.

Who cares to see the fountain's very shape,
And whether it be a Triton's or a Nymph's
That pours the foam, makes rainbows all
around?

You could not praise indeed the empty conch;
But I 'll pour floods of love and hide myself.
How I will love him! Can not men love
love?

Who was a queen and loved a poet once,
Humpbacked, a dwarf? ah, women can do
that!

Robert Browning

Well, but men too; at least, they tell you so.
They love so many women in their youth,
And even in age they all love whom they
please;

And yet the best of them confide to friends
That 't is not beauty makes the lasting love—
They spend a day with such and tire the
next:

They like soul,—well then, they like phan-
tasy,

Novelty even. Let us confess the truth,
Horrible tho' it be, that prejudice,
Prescription . . . curses! they will love
a queen

They will, they do: and will not, does not—
he?

Con. How can he? You are wedded; 't is
a name,

We know, but still a bond. Your rank
remains,

Robert Browning

His rank remains. How can he, nobly souled,
As you believe and I incline to think,
Aspire to be your favourite, shame and all?

Queen. Hear her! There, there now—could
she love like me?

What did I say of smooth-cheeked youth
and grace?

See all it does or could do! so, youth loves!
Oh, tell him, Constance, you could never do
What I will—you, it was not born in! I
Will drive these difficulties far and fast
As yonder mists curdling before the moon.
I'll use my light too, gloriously retrieve
My youth from its enforced calamity,
Dissolve that hateful marriage, and be his,
His own in the eyes alike of God and man.

Con. You will do—dare do . . . pause
on what you say!

Queen. Hear her! I thank you, sweet, for
that surprise.

Robert Browning

You have the fair face: for the soul, see mine!
I have the strong soul: let me teach you,
here.

I think I have borne enough and long enough,
And patiently enough, the world remarks,
To have my own way now, unblamed by all.
It does so happen (I rejoice for it)

This most unhopd-for issue cuts the knot.
There 's not a better way of settling claims
Than this: God sends the accident express:
And were it for my subjects' good, no more,
'T were best thus ordered. I am thankful
now,

Mute, passive, acquiescent. I receive,
And bless God simply, or should almost fear
To walk so smoothly to my ends at last.
Why, how I baffle obstacles, spurn fate!
How strong I am! Could Norbert see me
now!

Robert Browning

Con. Let me consider! It is all too strange.

Queen. You, Constance, learn of me; do
you, like me!

You are young, beautiful: my own, best girl,
You will have many lovers, and love one—
Light hair, not hair like Norbert's to suit
yours,

Taller than he is, since yourself are tall.
Love him, like me! Give all away to him;
Think never of yourself; throw by your
pride,

Hope, fear,—your own good as you saw it
once,

And love him simply for his very self.

Remember, I (and what am I to you?)

Would give up all for one, leave throne,
lose life,

Do all but just unlove him! He loves me.

Con. He shall.

Robert Browning

Queen. You, step inside my inmost heart!
Give me your own heart: let us have one
heart!

I 'll come to you for counsel; "this he says,
This he does; what should this amount to,
pray?

Beseech you, change it into current coin!
Is that worth kisses? Shall I please him
there?"

And then we 'll speak in turn of you—what
else?

Your love, according to your beauty's worth,
For you shall have some noble love, all gold:
Whom choose you? we will get him at your
choice.

—Constance, I leave you. Just a minute
since,

I felt as I must die or be alone
Breathing my soul into an ear like yours:

Robert Browning

Now, I would face the world with my new
life,

Wear my new crown. I 'll walk around the
rooms,

And then come back and tell you how it feels.
How soon a smile of God can change the
world!

How we are made for happiness—how work
Grows play, adversity a winning fight!

True I have lost so many years: what then?
Many remain: God has been very good.

You, stay here! 'T is as different from
dreams,

From the mind's cold calm estimate of bliss,
As these stone statues from the flesh and
blood.

The comfort thou hast caused mankind, God's
moon!

*[She goes out, leaving Constance. Dance-music
from within.]*

Robert Browning

Norbert enters.

Nor. Well? we have but one minute and
one word!

Con. I am yours, Norbert!

Nor. Yes, mine.

Con. Not till now!

You were mine. Now I give myself to you.

Nor. Constance?

Con. Your own! I know the thriftier way
Of giving—haply, 't is the wiser way
Meaning to give a treasure, I might dole
Coin after coin out (each, as that were all,
With a new largess still at each despair)
And force you keep in sight the deed, pre-
serve

Exhaustless till the end my part and yours,
My giving and your taking; both our joys
Dying together. Is it the wiser way?
I choose the simpler; I give all at once.

Robert Browning

Know what you have to trust to, trade upon!
Use it, abuse it,—anything but think
Hereafter, “Had I known she loved me so,
And what my means, I might have thriven
with it.”

This is your means. I give you all myself.

Nor. I take you and thank God,

Con. Look on thro’ years!

We can not kiss, a second day like this;
Else were this earth no earth.

Nor. With this day’s heat
We shall go on thro’ years of cold.

Con. So best!

—I try to see those years—I think I see.
You walk quick and new warmth comes;
you look back
And lay all to the first glow—not sit down
For ever brooding on a day like this
While seeing embers whiten and love die.

Robert Browning

Yes, love lives best in its effect; and mine,
Full in its own life, yearns to live in yours.

Nor. Just so. I take and know you all at
once.

Your soul is disengaged so easily,
Your face is there, I know you; give me time,
Let me be proud and think you shall know
me.

My soul is slower: in a life I roll
The minute out whereto you condense
yours—

The whole slow circle round you I must
move,

To be just you. I look to a long life
To decompose this minute, prove its worth.
'T is the sparks' long succession one by one
Shall show you, in the end, what fire was
crammed

In that mere stone you struck: how could
you know,

Robert Browning

If it lay ever unproved in your sight,
As now my heart lies? your own warmth
would hide
Its coldness, were it cold.

Con. But how prove, how?

Nor. Prove in my life, you ask?

Con. Quick, Norbert—how?

Nor. That 's easy told. I count life just a
stuff

To try the soul's strength on, educe the man.
Who keeps one end in view makes all things
serve.

As with the body—he who hurls a lance
Or heaps up stone on stone, shows strength
alike,

So must I seize and task all means to prove
And show this soul of mine, you crown as
yours,

And justify us both.

Robert Browning

Con. Could you write books,
Paint pictures! One sits down in poverty
And writes or paints, with pity for the rich.

Nor. And loves one's painting, and one's
writing, then,
And not one's mistress! All is best, believe,
And we best as no other than we are.
We live, and they experiment on life—
Those poets, painters, all who stand aloof
To overlook the farther. Let us be
The thing they look at! I might take your
face
And write of it and paint it—to what end?
For whom? what pale dictatress in the air
Feeds, smiling sadly, her fine ghost-like form
With earth's real blood and breath, the
beauteous life
She makes despised for ever? You are mine,
Made for me, not for others in the world,

Robert Browning

Nor yet for that which I should call my art,
The cold calm power to see how fair you
look.

I come to you ; I leave you not, to write
Or paint. You are, I am : let Rubens there
Paint us !

Con. So, best !

Nor. I understand your soul.
You live, and rightly sympathize with life,
With action, power, success. This way is
straight ;
And time were short beside, to let me change
The craft my childhood learnt : my craft
shall serve.

Men set me here to subjugate, enclose,
Manure their barren lives, and force thence
fruit

First for themselves, and afterward for me
In the due tithe ; the task of some one soul,

Robert Browning

Thro' ways of work appointed by the world.
I am not bid create—men see no star
Transfiguring my brow to warrant that—
But find and bind and bring to bear their
wills.

So I began: to-night sees how I end.
What if it see, too, power's first outbreak
here

Amid the warmth, surprise and sympathy,
And instincts of the heart that teach the head?
What if the people have discerned at length
The dawn of the next nature, novel brain
Whose will they venture in the place of
theirs,

Whose work, they trust, shall find them as
novel ways

To untried heights which yet he only sees?
I felt it when you kissed me. See this queen,
This people—in our phrase, this mass of men,

Robert Browning

See how the mass lies passive to my hand
Now that my hand is plastic, with you by
To make the muscles iron! Oh, an end
Shall crown this issue as this crowns the
first!

My will be on this people! then, the strain,
The grappling of the potter with his clay,
The long uncertain struggle,—the success
And consummation of the spirit-work,
Some vase shaped to the curl of the god's lip,
While rounded fair for human sense to see
The Graces in a dance men recognize
With turbulent applause and laughs of heart!
So triumph ever shall renew itself;
Ever shall end in efforts higher yet,
Ever begin . . . ,

Con. I ever helping?

Nor. Thus!

[As he embraces her, the Queen enters.]

Robert Browning

Con. Hist, madam! So have I performed
my part.

You see your gratitude's true decency,

Norbert? A little slow in seeing it!

Begin, to end the sooner! What 's a kiss?

Nor. Constance?

Con. Why, must I teach it you again?

You want a witness to your dulness, sir?

What was I saying these ten minutes long?

Then I repeat—when some young handsome
man

Like you has acted out a part like yours,

Is pleased to fall in love with one beyond,

So very far beyond him, as he says—

So hopelessly in love that but to speak

Would prove him mad,—he thinks judi-
ciously,

And makes some insignificant good soul,

Like me, his friend, adviser, confidant,

Robert Browning

And very stalking-horse to cover him
In following after what he dares not face—
When his end's gained—(sir, do you under-
stand?)

When she, he dares not face, has loved him
first,

—May I not say so, madam?—tops his hope,
And overpasses so his wildest dream,
With glad consent of all, and most of her,
The confidant, who brought the same about—
Why, in the moment when such joy ex-
plodes,

I do hold that the merest gentleman
Will not start rudely from the stalking horse,
Dismiss it with a "There, enough of you!"
Forget it, show his back unmannerly;
But like a liberal heart will rather turn
And say, "A tingling time of hope was ours;
Betwixt the fears and falterings, we two lived

Robert Browning

A chanceful time in waiting for the prize!
The confidant, the Constance, served not ill.
And tho' I shall forget her in due time,
Her use being answered now, as reason bids,
Nay as herself bids from her heart of hearts,—
Still, she has rights, the first thanks go to her,
The first good praise goes to the prosperous
tool,

And the first—which is the last—rewarding
kiss."

Nor. Constance, it is a dream—ah, see, you
smile!

Con. So, now his part being properly per-
formed,

Madam, I turn to you and finish mine
As duly: I do justice in my turn.

Yes, madam, he has loved you—long and
well;

He could not hope to tell you so—'t was I

Robert Browning

Who served to prove your soul accessible.
I led his thoughts on, drew them to their
place
When they had wandered else into despair,
And kept love constant toward its natural
aim.
Enough, my part is played; you stoop half-
way
And meet us royally and spare our fears:
'T is like yourself. He thanks you, so do I.
Take him—with my full heart! my work is
praised
By what comes of it. Be you happy, both!
Yourself—the only one on earth who can—
Do all for him, much more than a mere heart
Which tho' warm is not useful in its warmth
As the silk vesture of a queen! fold that
Around him gently, tenderly. For him—
For him,—he knows his own part!

Robert Browning

Nor. Have you done?
I take the jest at last. Should I speak now?
Was yours the wager, Constance, foolish
child,
Or did you but accept it? Well—at least
You lose by it.

Con. Nay, madam, 't is your turn!
 Restrain him still from speech a little more,
 And make him happier as more confident!
 Pity him, madam, he is timid yet!
 Mark, Norbert! Do not shrink now! Here
 I yield
 My whole right in you to the queen, observe!
 With her go put in practice the great schemes
 'You teem with, follow the career else closed—
 Be all you can not be except by her!
 Behold her!—Madam, say for pity's sake
 Anything—frankly say you love him! Else
 He 'll not believe it: there's more earnest in

Robert Browning

His fear than you conceive: I know the man!

Nor. I know the woman somewhat, and
confess

I thought she had jested better: she begins
To overcharge her part. I gravely wait
Your pleasure, madam: where is my reward?

Queen. Norbert, this wild girl (whom I
recognize

Scarce more than you do, in her fancy-fit,
Eccentric speech and variable mirth,
Not very wise, perhaps, and somewhat bold,
Yet suitable, the whole night's work being
strange)

—May still be right: I may do well to speak
And make authentic what appears a dream
To even myself. For, what she says, is true.
Yes, Norbert—what you spoke just now of
love,

Devotion, stirred no novel sense in me,

Robert Browning

But justified a warmth felt long before.
Yes, from the first—I loved you, I shall say :
Strange ! but I do grow stronger, now 't is
said.

Your courage helps mine : you did well to
speak

To-night, the night that crowns your twelve-
month's toil :

But still I had not waited to discern
Your heart so long, believe me ! From the
first

The source of so much zeal was almost plain,
In absence even of your own words just now
Which hazarded the truth. 'T is very
strange,

But takes a happy ending—in your love
Which mine meets : be it so ! as you chose
me,

So I choose you.

Robert Browning

Nor. And worthily you choose.
I will not be unworthy your esteem,
No, madam. I do love you; I will meet
Your nature, now I know it. This was well.
I see,—you dare and you are justified:
But none had ventured such experiment,
Less versed than you in nobleness of heart,
Less confident of finding such in me.
I joy that thus you test me ere you grant
The dearest richest beauteousest and best
Of women to my arms: 't is like yourself.
So—back again into my part's set words—
Devotion to the uttermost is yours,
But no, you can not, madam, even you,
Create in me the love our Constance does.
Or—something truer to the tragic phrase—
Not yon magnolia-bell superb with scent
Invites a certain insect—that 's myself—
But the small eye-flower nearer to the
ground.

Robert Browning

I take this lady.

Con. Stay—not hers, the trap—
Stay, Norbert—that mistake were worst of
all!

He is too cunning, madam! It was I,
I Norbert, who . . .

Nor. You, was it, Constance? Then,
But for the grace of this divinest hour
Which gives me you, I might not pardon
here!

I am the Queen's; she only knows my brain:
She may experiment upon my heart
And I instruct her too by the result.
But you, Sweet, you who know me, who so
long

Have told my heart-beats over, held my life
In those white hands of yours,—it is not well!

Con. Tush! I have said it, did I not say it
all?

Robert Browning

The life, for her—the heart-beats, for her
sake!

Nor. Enough! my cheek grows red, I think.

Your test?

There's not the meanest woman in the
world,

Not she I least could love in all the world,
Whom, did she love me, had love proved
itself,

I dare insult as you insult me now.

Constance, I could say, if it must be said,
“Take back the soul you offer, I keep mine!”

But—“Take the soul still quivering on your
hand,

The soul so offered, which I can not use,
And, please you, give it to some playful
friend,

For—what's the trifle he requites me with?”

—I, tempt a woman, to amuse a man,

Robert Browning

That two may mock her heart if it succumb?
No: fearing God and standing 'neath His
heaven,

I would not dare insult a woman so,
Were she the meanest woman in the world,
And he, I cared to please, ten emperors!

Con. Norbert!

Nor. I love once as I live but once.
What case is this to think or talk about?
I love you. Would it mend the case at all
If such a step as this killed love in me?
Your part were done: account to God for it!
But mine—could murdered love get up again,
And kneel to whom you please to designate,
And make you mirth? It is too horrible.
You did not know this, Constance? now you
know
That body and soul have each one life, but
one;

Robert Browning

And here's my love, here, living, at your feet.

Con. See the Queen! Norbert—this one
more last word—

If thus you have taken jest for earnest—thus
Loved me in earnest. . . .

Nor. Ah, no jest holds here!

Where is the laughter in which jests break up,
And what this horror that grows palpable?
Madam—why grasp you thus the balcony?
Have I done ill? Have I not spoken truth?
How could I other? Was it not your test,
To try me, what my love for Constance
meant?

Madam, your royal soul itself approves,
The first, that I should choose thus! so one
takes

A beggar,—asks him, what would buy his
child?

And then approves the expected laugh of
scorn

Robert Browning

Returned as something noble from the rags.
Speak, Constance, I 'm the beggar! Ha,
what 's this?

You two glare each at each like panthers
now.

Constance, the world fades: only you stand
there!

You did not, in to-night's wild whirl of things,
Sell me—your soul of souls, for any price?

No—no—'t is easy to believe in you!

Was it your love's mad trial to o'ertop

Mine by this vain self-sacrifice? well, still—

Tho' I might curse, I love you. I am love

And can not change: love's self is at your
feet.

[*The Queen goes out.*]

Con. Feel my heart; let it die against your
own!

Nor. Against my own. Explain not; let
this be!

Robert Browning

This is life's height.

Con. Yours, yours, yours!

Nor. You and I—

Why care by what meanders we are here
I' the centre of the labyrinth? Men have
died

Trying to find this place, which we have
found.

Con. Found, found!

Nor. Sweet, never fear what she can do!
We are past harm now.

Con. On the breast of God.
I thought of men—as if you were a man.
Tempting him with a crown!

Nor. This must end here:
It is too perfect.

Con. There 's the music stopped.
What measured heavy tread? It is one
blaze

Robert Browning

About me and within me.

Nor. Oh, some death
Will run its sudden finger round this spark
And sever us from the rest!

Con. And so do well.
Now the doors open.

Nor. 'T is the guard comes.

Con. Kiss!

Robert Browning



E were two lovers; let me
lie by her,
My tomb beside her tomb.
On hers inscribe—
“I loved him; but my rea-
son bade prefer
Duty to love, reject the
tempter’s bribe

Of rose and lily when each path diverged,
And either I must pace to life’s far end
As love should lead me, or, as duty urged,
Plod the worn causeway arm in arm with
friend.

So, truth turned falsehood: ‘How I loath
a flower,
How prize the pavement!’ still caressed his
ear—

The deafish friend’s—thro’ life’s day, hour
by hour,

Robert Browning

As he laughed (coughing) 'Ay, it would
appear!'

But deep within my heart of hearts there hid
Ever the confidence, amends for all,
That heaven repairs what wrong earth's
journey did,

When love from life-long exile comes at call.
Duty and love, one broad way, were the
best—

Who doubts? But one or other was to
choose.

I chose the darkling half, and wait the rest
In that new world where light and darkness
fuse."

Inscribe on mine—"I loved her: love's track
lay

O'er sand and pebble, as all travelers know.
Duty led thro' a smiling country, gay
With greensward where the rose and lily
blow.

Robert Browning

‘Our roads are diverse: farewell, love!’ said
she:

‘’T is duty I abide by: homely sward
And not the rock-rough picturesque for me!
Above, where both roads join, I wait reward.
Be you as constant to the path whereon
I leave you planted!’ But man needs must
move,

Keep moving—whither, when the star is gone
Whereby he steps secure nor strays from
love?

No stone but I was tripped by, stumbling-
block

But brought me to confusion. Where I fell,
There I lay flat, if moss disguised the rock:
Thence, if flint pierced, I rose and cried
‘All ’s well!

Duty be mine to tread in that high sphere
Where love from duty ne’er disparts, I trust,

Robert Browning

And two halves make that whole, whereof—
since here

One must suffice a man—why, this one
must! ’ ’

Inscribe each tomb thus: then, some sage
acquaint

The simple—which holds sinner, which holds
saint!

Robert Browning



EAREST, three months
ago,
When we loved each other
so,
Lived and loved the
same
Till an evening came
When a shaft from the
Devil's bow

Pierced to our ingle-glow,
And the friends were friend and foe!
Not from the heart beneath—
'T was a bubble born of breath,
Neither sneer nor vaunt,
Nor reproach nor taunt.
See a word, how it severeth!
Oh, power of life and death
In the tongue, as the Preacher saith!

Robert Browning

Woman, and will you cast
For a word, quite off at last
 Me, your own, your You,—
 Since, as truth is true,
I was You all the happy past—
 Me do you leave aghast
With the memories We amassed?

Love, if you knew the light
That your soul casts in my sight,
 How I look to you
 For the pure and true,
And the beauteous and the right,—
 Bear with a moment's spite
When a mere mote threatens the white!
 —*From "A Lovers' Quarrel."*

Robert Browning



ALL'S over, then : does truth
sound bitter

As one at first believes?
Hark, 't is the sparrows'
good-night twitter
About your cottage eaves!

And the leaf-buds on the
vine are woolly,

I noticed that, to-day ;
One day more bursts them open fully :
You know the red turns gray.

To-morrow we meet the same then, dearest?
May I take your hand in mine?
Mere friends are we,—well, friends the merest
Keep much that I resign:

For each glance of the eye so bright and black,
Tho' I keep with heart's endeavour,—
Your voice, when you wish the snowdrops
back,
Tho' it stay in my soul for ever!—

Robert Browning

Yet I will but say what mere friends say,
Or only a thought stronger;
I will hold your hand but as long as all may,
Or so very little longer!

Robert Browning



LL June I bound the rose
in sheaves.

Now, rose by rose, I strip
the leaves

And strew them where
Pauline may pass.

She will not turn aside?

Alas!

Let them lie. Suppose they die?

The chance was they might take her eye.

How many a month I strove to suit

These stubborn fingers to the lute!

To-day I venture all I know.

She will not hear my music? So!

Break the string; fold music's wing:

Suppose Pauline had bade me sing!

My whole life long I learned to love.

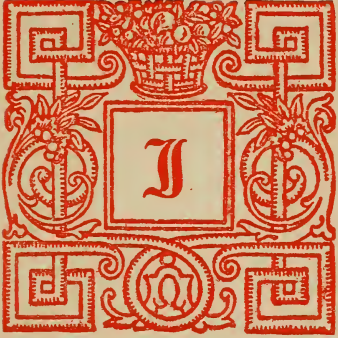
This hour my utmost art I prove

Robert Browning

And speak my passion—heaven or hell?
She will not give me heaven? 'T is well!
Lose who may—I still can say,
Those who win heaven, blest are they!

Robert Browning

THE LAST RIDE TOGETHER



SAID — Then, dearest,
 since 't is so,
Since now at length my fate
 I know,
Since nothing all my love
 avails,
Since all, my life seemed
 meant for, fails,

 Since this was written and needs must be—
My whole heart rises up to bless
Your name in pride and thankfulness!
Take back the hope you gave,—I claim
Only a memory of the same,
—And this beside, if you will not blame,
 Your leave for one more last ride with me.

My mistress bent that brow of hers;
Those deep dark eyes where pride demurs

Robert Browning

When pity would be softening through,
Fixed me a breathing-while or two

With life or death in the balance: right!
The blood replenished me again;
My last thought was at least not vain:
I and my mistress, side by side
Shall be together, breathe and ride,
So, one day more am I deified.

Who knows but the world may end to-
night?

Hush! if you saw some western cloud
All billowy-bosomed, over-bowed
By many benedictions—sun's
And moon's and evening star's at once—

And so, you, looking and loving best,
Conscious grew, your passion drew
Cloud, sunset, moonrise, star-shine, too,
Down on you, near and yet more near,

Robert Browning

Till flesh must fade for heaven was here!—
Thus leant she and lingered—joy and fear!
Thus lay she a moment on my breast

Then we began to ride. My soul
Smoothed itself out, a long-cramped scroll
Freshening and fluttering in the wind.
Past hopes already lay behind.

What need to strive with a life awry?
Had I said that, had I done this,
So might I gain, so might I miss.
Might she have loved me? just as well
She might have hated, who can tell!
Where had I been now if the worst befell?
And here we are riding, she and I.

Fail I alone, in words and deeds?
Why, all men strive and who succeeds?
We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,

Robert Browning

Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side.
I thought,—All labour, yet no less
Bear up beneath their unsuccess.
Look at the end of work, contrast
The petty done, the undone vast,
This present of theirs with the hopeful past!
I hoped she would love me; here we ride.

What hand and brain went ever paired?
What heart alike conceived and dared?
What act proved all its thought had been?
What will but felt the fleshly screen?

We ride and I see her bosom heave.
There's many a crown for who can reach.
Ten lines, a statesman's life in each!
The flag stuck on a heap of bones,
A soldier's doing! what atones?
They scratch his name on the Abbey-stones.
My riding is better; by their leave.

Robert Browning

What does it all mean, poet? Well,
Your brains beat into rhythm, you tell
What we felt only; you expressed,
You hold things beautiful the best,
And pace them in rhyme so, side by side.
'T is something, nay 't is much: but then,
Have you yourself what 's best for men?
Are you—poor, sick, old ere your time—
Nearer one whit your own sublime
Than we who never have turned a rhyme?
Sing, riding 's a joy! For me, I ride.

And you, great sculptor—so, you gave
A score of years to Art, her slave,
And that 's your Venus, whence we turn
To yonder girl that fords the burn!

You acquiesce, and shall I repine?
What, man of music, you grown gray
With notes and nothing else to say,

Robert Browning

Is this your sole praise from a friend,
"Greatly his opera's strains intend,
But in music we know how fashions end!"
I gave my youth; but we ride, in fine.

Who knows what 's fit for us? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being—had I signed the bond—
Still one must lead some life beyond,
Have a bliss to die with, dim-descried.
This foot once planted on the goal
This glory-garland round my soul,
Could I descry such? Try and test!
I sink back shuddering from the quest.
Earth being so good, would heaven seem best?
Now, heaven and she are beyond this ride.

And yet—she has not spoke so long!
What if heaven be that, fair and strong

Robert Browning

At life's best, with our eyes upturned
Whither life's flower is first discerned

We, fixed so, ever should so abide?
What if we still ride on, we two,
With life for ever old yet new,
Changed not in kind but in degree,
The instant made eternity,—
And heaven just prove that I and she
Ride, ride together, for ever ride?

Robert Browning



BEAUTIFUL Evelyn Hope
is dead !

Sit and watch by her side
an hour.

That is her book-shelf, this
her bed ;

She plucked that piece of
geranium-flower,

Beginning to die too, in the glass ;

Little has yet been changed, I think :

The shutters are shut, no light may pass

Save two long rays thro' the hinge's chink.

Sixteen years old when she died !

Perhaps she had scarcely heard my name ;

It was not her time to love ; beside,

Her life had many a hope and aim,

Duties enough and little cares,

And now was quiet, now astir,

Till God's hand beckoned unawares,—

And the sweet white brow is all of her.

Robert Browning

Is it too late then, Evelyn Hope?

What, your soul was pure and true,
The good stars met in your horoscope,
Made you of spirit, fire and dew—
And just because I was thrice as old
And our paths in the world diverged so
wide,
Each was naught to each, must I be told?
We were fellow mortals, naught beside?

No, indeed! for God above

Is great to grant, as mighty to make,
And creates the love to reward the love:
I claim you still, for my own love's sake!
Delayed it may be for more lives yet,
Thro' worlds I shall traverse, not a few:
Much is to learn, much to forget
Ere the time be come for taking you.

Robert Browning

But the time will come, at last it will,
When, Evelyn Hope, what meant (I shall
say)

In the lower earth, in the years long still,
That body and soul so pure and gay?
Why your hair was amber, I shall divine,
And your mouth of your own geranium's
red—

And what you would do with me, in fine,
In the new life come in the old one's stead.

I have lived (I shall say) so much since then,
Given up myself so many times,
Gained me the gains of various men,
Ransacked the ages, spoiled the climes;
Yet one thing, one, in my soul's full scope,
Either I missed or itself missed me:
And I want and find you, Evelyn Hope!
What is the issue? let us see!

Robert Browning

I loved you, Evelyn, all the while!

My heart seemed full as it could hold;
There was place and to spare for the frank
young smile,

And the red young mouth, and the hair's
young gold.

So hush,—I will give you this leaf to keep:

See, I shut it inside the sweet cold hand!

There, that is our secret: go to sleep!

You will wake, and remember, and under-
stand.

L.of C.

Robert Browning

JAMES LEE'S WIFE.

JAMES LEE'S WIFE SPEAKS AT THE WINDOW.



H, Love, but a day,
And the world has
changed!
The sun's away,
And the bird estranged;
The wind has dropped,
And the sky's deranged:
Summer has stopped.

Look in my eyes!
Wilt thou change too?
Should I fear surprise?
Shall I find aught new
In the old and dear,
In the good and true,
With the changing year?

Robert Browning

Thou art a man,
But I am thy love.
For the lake, its swan;
For the dell, its dove;
And for thee—(oh, haste!)
Me, to bend above,
Me, to hold embraced.

BY THE FIRESIDE.

Is all our fire of shipwreck wood,
Oak and pine?
Oh, for the ills half-understood,
The dim dead woe
Long ago
Befallen this bitter coast of France!
Well, poor sailors took their chance:
I take mine.

Robert Browning

A ruddy shaft our fire must shoot
O'er the sea;
Do sailors eye the casement—mute,
Drenched and stark,
From their bark—
And envy, gnash their teeth for hate
O' the warm safe house and happy freight
—Thee and me?

God help you, sailors, at your need!
Spare the curse!
For some ships, safe in port indeed,
Rot and rust,
Run to dust,
All thro' worms i' the wood, which crept,
Gnawed our hearts out while we slept:
That is worse.

Who lived here before us two?
Old-world pairs.

Robert Browning

Did a woman ever—would I knew!—

Watch the man

With whom began

Love's voyage, full-sail,—(now, gnash your
teeth!)

When planks start, open hell beneath
Unawares?

IN THE DOORWAY.

The swallow has set her six young on the
rail,

And looks seaward:

The water 's in stripes like a snake, olive-
pale

To the leeward,—

On the weather-side, black, spotted white
with the wind.

“Good fortune departs, and disaster 's be-
hind,”

Robert Browning

Hark, the wind with its wants and its infinite
wail!

Our fig-tree, that leaned for the saltness, has
furled

Her five fingers,
Each leaf like a hand opened wide to the
world

Where there lingers
No glint of the gold Summer sent for her
sake:

How the vines writhe in rows, each impaled
on its stake!

My heart shrivels up and my spirit shrinks
curled.

Yet here are we two; we have love, house
enough,

With the field there,
This house of four rooms, that field red and
rough,

Robert Browning

Tho' it yield there,
For the rabbit that robs, scarce a blade or a
bent;
If a magpie alight now, it seems an event;
And they both will be gone at November's
rebuff.

But why must cold spread? but wherefore
bring change
To the spirit,
God meant should mate His with an infinite
range,
And inherit
His power to put life in the darkness and
cold?
Oh, live and love worthily, bear and be bold!
Whom Summer made friends of, let Winter
estrangle!

Robert Browning

ALONG THE BEACH.

I will be quiet and talk with you,
And reason why you are wrong.
You wanted my love—is that much true?
And so I did love, so I do:
What has come of it all along?

I took you—how could I otherwise?
For a world to me, and more;
For all, love greatens and glorifies
Till God 's a-glow, to the loving eyes,
In what was mere earth before.

Yes, earth—yes, mere ignoble earth?
Now do I mis-state, mistake?
Do I wrong your weakness and call it worth?
Expect all harvest, dread no dearth,
Seal my sense up for your sake?

Robert Browning

Oh, Love, Love, no, Love! not so, indeed!
You were just weak earth, I knew:
With much in you waste, with many a weed
And plenty of passions run to seed,
But a little good grain too.

And such as you were, I took you for mine:
Did not you find me yours,
To watch the olive and wait the vine,
And wonder when rivers of oil and wine
Would flow, as the Book assures?

Well, and if none of these good things came,
What did the failure prove?
The man was my whole world, all the same,
With his flowers to praise or his weeds to
blame,
And, either or both, to love.

Robert Browning

Yet this turns now to a fault—there! there!
That I do love, watch too long,
And wait too well, and weary and wear;
And 't is all an old story, and my despair
Fit subject for some new song:

“How the light, light love, he has wings to fly
At suspicion of a bond:
My wisdom has bidden your pleasure good-
bye,
Which will turn up next in a laughing eye,
And why should you look beyond?”

ON THE CLIFF.

I leaned on the turf,
I looked at a rock
Left dry by the surf;
For the turf, to call it grass were a mock:
Dead to the roots, so deep was done
The work of the summer sun.

Robert Browning

And the rock lay flat
As an anvil's face :
No iron like that !
Baked dry : of a weed, of a shell, no trace :
Sunshine outside, but ice at the core,
Death's altar by the lone shore.

On the turf, sprang gay
With his films of blue,
No cricket, I 'll say,
But a war-horse, barded and chanfroned too,
The gift of a quixote-mage to his knight,
Real fairy, with wings all right.

On the rock, they scorch
Like a drop of fire
From a brandished torch,
Fall two red fans of a butterfly :
No turf, no rock,—in their ugly stead,
See, wonderful blue and red !

Robert Browning

Is it not so
With the minds of men?
The level and low,
The burnt and bare, in themselves; but then
With such a blue and red grace, not theirs,
Love settling unawares!

READING A BOOK, UNDER THE CLIFF

“Still ailing, Wind? Wilt be appeased or no?
Which needs the other’s office, thou or I?
Dost want to be disburthened of a woe,
And can, in truth, my voice untie
Its links, and let it go?

“Art thou a dumb wronged thing that would
be righted,
Entrusting thus thy cause to me? Forbear!
No tongue can mend such pleadings; faith,
requited

Robert Browning

With falsehood,—Love, at last aware
Of scorn,—hopes, early blighted,—

“We have them; but I know not any tone
So fit as thine to falter forth a sorrow:
Dost think men would go mad without a
moan,
If they knew any way to borrow
A pathos like thine own?”

“Which sigh wouldst mock, of all the sighs?
The one
So long escaping from lips starved and
blue,
That lasts while on her pallet-bed the nun
Stretches her length; her foot comes
through
The straw she shivers on;

“You had not thought she was so tall and
spent:

Robert Browning

Her shrunk lids open, her lean fingers shut
Close, close; their sharp and livid nails indent
The clammy palm; then all is mute:
That way, the spirit went.

“Or wouldst thou rather that I understand
Thy will to help me?—like the dog I found
Once, pacing sad this solitary strand,
Who would not take my food, poor hound,
But whined and licked my hand.”

All this, and more, comes from some young
man's pride
Of power to see,—in failure and mistake,
Relinquishment, disgrace, on every side,—
Merely examples for his sake,
Helps to his path untried:

Instances he must—simply recognize?
Oh, more than so!—must, with a learner's
zeal,

Robert Browning

Make doubly prominent, twice emphasize,
By added touches that reveal
The god in babe's disguise.

Oh, he knows what defeat means, and the
rest!

Himself the undefeated that shall be:
Failure, disgrace, he flings them you to test,—
His triumph, in eternity
Too plainly manifest!

Whence, judge if he learn forthwith what
the wind

Means in its moaning—by the happy
prompt

Instinctive way of youth, I mean; for kind
Calm years, exacting their accompt
Of pain, mature the mind:

And some midsummer morning, at the lull
Just about daybreak, as he looks across

Robert Browning

A sparkling foreign country, wonderful
To the sea's edge for gloom and gloss,
Next minute must annul,—

Then, when the wind begins among the vines,
So low, so low, what shall it say but this?
“Here is the change beginning, here the lines
Circumscribe beauty, set to bliss
The limit time assigns.”

Nothing can be as it has been before;
Better, so call it, only not the same.
To draw one beauty into our hearts' core
And keep it changeless! such our claim;
So answered,—Never more!

Simple? Why this is the old woe o' the
world;
Tune, to whose rise and fall we live and
die.

Robert Browning

Rise with it, then! Rejoice that man is
hurled

From change to change unceasingly,
His soul's wings never furled!

That 's a new question; still replies the fact,
Nothing endures: the wind moans, saying
so;

We moan in acquiescence: there 's life's
pact,

Perhaps probation—do *I* know?
God does: endure his act!

Only, for man, how bitter not to grave
On his soul's hands' palms one fair good
wise thing

Just as he grasped it! For himself, death's
wave;

While time first washes—ah, the sting!—
O'er all he 'd sink to save.

Robert Browning

AMONG THE ROCKS.

Oh, good gigantic smile o' the brown old
earth,

This autumn morning! How he sets his
bones

To bask i' the sun, and thrusts out knees
and feet

For the ripple to run over in its mirth;

Listening the while, where on the heap of
stones

The white breast of the sea-lark twitters
sweet.

That is the doctrine, simple, ancient, true;
Such is life's trial, as old earth smiles and
knows.

If you loved only what were worth your love!
Love were clear gain, and wholly well for
you:

Robert Browning

Make the low nature better by your throes;
Give earth yourself, go up for gain above!

ON DECK

There is nothing to remember in me,
Nothing I ever said with a grace,
Nothing I did that you care to see,
Nothing I was that deserves a place
In your mind, now I leave you, set you free.
Conceded! In turn, concede to me,
Such things have been as a mutual flame.
Your soul's locked fast; but, love for a key,
You might let it loose, till I grew the same
In your eyes, as in mine you stand: strange
plea!

For then, then, what would it matter to me
That I was the harsh, ill-favoured one?
We both should be like as pea and pea;
It was ever so since the world begun:
So, let me proceed with my reverie.

Robert Browning

How strange it were if you had all me,
As I have all you in my heart and brain,
You, whose least word brought gloom or glee,
Who never lifted the hand in vain
Will hold mind yet, from over the sea!

Strange, if a face, when you thought of me,
Rose like your own face present now,
With eyes as dear in their due degree,
Much such a mouth, and as bright a brow,
Till you saw yourself, while you cried "'T is
She!"

Well, you may, you must, set down to me
Love that was life, life that was love;
A tenure of breath at your lips' decree,
A passion to stand as your thoughts
approve,
A rapture to fall where your foot might be.
But did one touch of such love for me
Come in a word or a look of yours,

Robert Browning

Whose words and looks will, circling, flee
Round me and round while life endures—
Could I fancy “As I feel, thus feels He;”

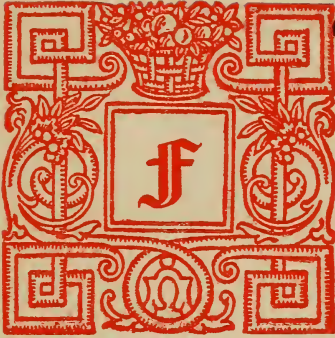
Why, fade you might to a thing like me,
And your hair grow these coarse hanks of
hair,
Your skin, this bark of a gnarled tree,—
You might turn myself!—should I know
or care,
When I should be dead of joy, James Lee?

The Love Poems

of

Leigh Hunt

Leigh Hunt



OR there are two heavens,
sweet,
Both made of love,—one,
inconceivable
Ev'n by the other, so
divine it is;
The other, far on this
side of the stars,
By men called Home.



BETTER to have the love
of one
Than smiles like
morning dew ;
Better to have a living
seed
Than flowers of every
hue.

Better to feel a love within
Than be lovely to the sight ;
Better a homely tenderness
Than beauty's wild delight.

Better to love than be beloved,
Though lonely all the day ;
Better the fountain in the heart
Than the fountain by the way.

Better the thanks of one dear heart
Than a nation's voice of praise ;
Better the twilight ere the dawn
Than yesterday's mid-blaze.

Leigh Hunt

TO MY WIFE.

ON MODELLING MY BUST.



H, Marian mine, the face
you look on now
Is not exactly like my
wedding-day's:
Sunk is its cheek,
deeper-retired its gaze,
Less white and smooth its
temple-flattened brow.

Sorrow has been there with his silent plough,
And strait, stern hand. No matter, if it
raise

Aught that affection fancies, it may praise,
Or make me worthier than Apollo's bough.

Leigh Hunt

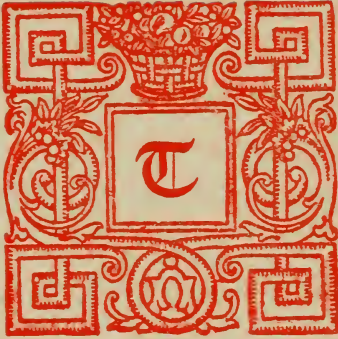
Loss after all,—such loss especially,—
Is transfer, change, but not extinction,—no ;
Part in our children's apple cheeks I see ;
And, for the rest, while you look at me so,
Take care you do not smile it back to me,
And miss the copied furrows as you go.

Leigh Hunt



JENNY kiss'd me when we
met,
Jumping from the chair
she sat in;
Time, you thief, who love
to get
Sweets into your list, put
that in:

Say I'm weary, say I'm sad,
Say that health and wealth have miss'd
me,
Say I'm growing old, but add,
Jenny kiss'd me.



HERE liv'd a knight, when
kighthood was in
flow'r,
Who charm'd alike the
tilt-yard and the bow'r;
Young, handsome, blithe,
loyal and brave of
course,

He stuck as firmly to his friend as horse;
And only show'd, for so complete a youth,
Somewhat too perfect a regard for truth.
He own'd 'twas inconvenient; sometimes
felt

A wish 'twere buckled in another's belt;
Doubted its modesty, its use, its right,
Yet after all remain'd the same true knight:
So potent is a custom early taught;
And to such straits may honest men be
brought.

Leigh Hunt

'Tis true, to be believ'd was held a claim
Of gentle blood, and not to be, a shame:—
A liar, notorious as the noonday sun,
Was bound to fight you, if you call'd him
one:—

But yet to be so nice, and stand, profess'd,
All truth, was held a pedantry at best;
Invidious by the men; and by the fair
A thing at once to dote on and beware.
What bliss to meet his flatteries, eye to eye!
But could he not, then, tell one little lie?

At length, our hero found, to take his part,
A lovely girl, a quick and virgin heart,
One that believ'd what any friend averr'd,
Much more the whisp'rer of earth's sweetest
word.

He lov'd her for her cordial, trusting ways,
Her love of love, and readiness to praise;

And she lov'd him because he told her so,
And truth makes true love doubly sweet to
know.

It chanc'd this lady in relation stood
To one as beautiful, but not so good,
Who had been blaz'd, for what indeed she
was,
By a young lord, over his hippocras,
Her lover once, but now so far from tender,
He swore he'd kick her very least defender.
The world look'd hard for some one of her
kin
To teach this spark to look to his own skin;
But no one came: the lady wept for spite:
At length her cousin ask'd it of the knight.

The knight look'd troubled to the last
degree,
Turn'd pale, then red, but said it could not
be.

Leigh Hunt

With many sighs he said it, many pray'rs
To be well construed—nay, at last with tears:
And own'd a knight might possibly be better,
Who read the truth less nicely to the letter;
But 'twas his weakness—'twas his educa-
tion,—

A dying priest had taught him, his relation,
A kind of saint, who meant him for the
church,

And thus had left his breeding in the lurch;
The good old man! he lov'd him, and took
blame

(He own'd it) thus to mix his love with
shame;

“But oh reflect, my sweet one,” cried the
youth;

“How you yourself have lov'd me for my
truth;

How I love you for loving it, and how

Secure it makes us of our mutual vow.
To feel this hand, to look into those eyes,—
It makes me feel as sure as of the earth and
skies.”

“I did love, and I do,” the lady cried,
With hand but half allow’d, and cheek aside;
“But then I thought you took me at my
word,
And would have scorn’d what I pronounc’d
absurd.
My cousin’s wrong’d; I’m sure of it; do you
Be sure as well, and show what you can do:
Let but one mind be seen betwixt us two.”

In vain our hero, while his aspect glow’d
To hear these lovely words, the difference
show’d
‘Twixt her kind wishes and an ill desert:
The more he talk’d, the more her pride was
hurt,

Till rais'd from glow to glow, and tear to
tear,
And pique to injury, she spoke of fear.

“Fear!” cried the knight, blushing because
he blush'd,
While sorrow through his gaze in wonder
rush'd;
“Had I been present when this lord was
heard,
I might perhaps have stopp'd him with a
word;
One word (had I suspected it) to show
How ignorant you were of what all know;
And with what passion you could take the
part
Of one, unworthy of your loving heart:
But when I know the truth, and know that he
Knew not, nor thought, of either you or me,

And when I'm call'd on, and in open day,
To swear that true is false, and yea is nay,
And know I'm in a lie, and yet go through it,
By all that's blest I own I cannot do it.
Let me but feel me buckled for the right,
And come a world in arms, I'm still a knight:
But give my foe the truth, and me the fraud,
And the pale scholar of the priest is awed."

"Say not the word," the hasty fair one
cried :

"I see it all, and wish I might have died.
Go, Sir, oh go! a soldier and afraid!
Was it for this you lov'd a trusting maid?
Your presence kills me, Sir, with shame and
grief."—

She said; and sunk in tears and handkerchief.

"Ah, Mabel," said the knight, as with a
kiss

Leigh Hunt

He bow'd on her dropp'd head, "you'll
mourn for this."

He look'd upon her glossy locks, admir'd
Their gentleness for once, and with a sigh
retir'd.

—*From "The Gentle Armour."*



BOU BEN ADHEM (may
his tribe increase!)

Awoke one night from a
deep dream of peace,
And saw, within the
moonlight in his room,
Making it rich, and like
a lily in bloom,

An angel writing in a book of gold:—
Exceeding peace had been Ben Adhem bold,
And to the presence in the room he said,
“What writest thou?”—The vision rais’d
its head,
And with a look made of all sweet accord,
Answer’d, “The names of those who love
the Lord.”

“And is mine one?” said Abou. “Nay, not
so,”

Replied the angel. Abou spoke more low,

Leigh Hunt

But cheerly still; and said, "I pray thee then,
Write me as one that loves his fellow-men."

The angel wrote, and vanish'd. The next
night

It came again with a great wakening light,
And show'd the names whom love of God
had bless'd,
And lo! Ben Adhem's name led all the rest.

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